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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Assassination of Benazir Bhutto

Key stories in the media:

All media led with the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader

and former PM Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi on Thursday. Ha'aretz headlined: "Grave Crisis in Muslim State that Has Nuclear Weapons." Several media reported that Israeli leaders, including President Shimon Peres, paid tribute to Bhutto, even though Israel and Pakistan do not have diplomatic ties. PM Ehud Olmert told The Jerusalem Post: "I saw her as someone who could have served as a bridgehead to relations with that part of the Muslim world with whom our ties are naturally limited." He was quoted as saying that the assassination was a "great tragedy" and that he received the news "with deep sadness." Olmert was further quoted as saying that two months ago Bhutto relayed a message that she would "in the future like to strengthen the ties between Israel and Pakistan. Israel TV and Israel Radio quoted Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Gillerman as saying that at a meeting with Bhutto two months ago, she told him that she would take steps towards normalizing ties with Israel if elected prime minister. Gillerman wrote an obituary for her in Maariv. Maariv reported that shortly before returning from exile, Bhutto had asked the Mossad to protect her -- a request that Maariv says was considered but not put into action.

Leading media reported that on Thursday PM Olmert promised PA President Mahmoud Abbas during their meeting in Jerusalem that Israel will not undermine negotiations toward a final-status agreement. Ha'aretz and Maariv reported that on Wednesday Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called the two leaders, urging them to end the stalemate. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert and Abbas agreed to put an end to the Har Homa crisis. The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli official as saying that Ma'aleh Adumim and Har Homa were already existing facts therefore adding to them does not prejudice any possible agreement. Yediot cited Abbas's office as saying that the meeting did not produce any result.

Major media reported that nine Islamic Jihad and Hamas operatives -- including senior Islamic Jihad militant Muhammad Abdullah Abu Murshud, whom the Israeli media dub the "Qassam rockets' brain" -- were killed overnight in a series of IDF raids in the Gaza Strip. Leading media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that IDF troops killed a security guard of Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala). Leading media reported that an IAF helicopter was almost hit by a Hamas missile.

Maariv reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad offered Ehud Barak through Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak a channel to "bypass Olmert." The newspaper quoted a senior GOI source as saying that Assad's attempt to bypass Olmert is irrelevant and that Barak will not play this game. Likud MK Yuval Steinitz was quoted as saying in an interview with Makor Rishon-Hatzofe that Egypt's rapport with Hamas in Gaza is similar to Syria's with Hizbullah in Lebanon.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Jordan has in recent months rejected requests from the Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashal to reestablish formal Jordan-Hamas relations and open Hamas offices in its territory.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR) accused the IDF of deliberately delaying action on requests to allow seriously ill Palestinians from Gaza to enter Israel for life-saving or urgent hospital treatment.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe and The Jerusalem Post reported that Ha'aretz editor David Landau told Secretary Rice at a recent private dinner that Israel "wants to be raped by the U.S." and needed more vigorous American intervention to resolve Middle East conflicts, according to the New York Jewish Week. The Jerusalem Post reported that Landau told the New York weekly that this description was "inaccurate" and a "perversion of what I said," although he repeated his first statement,

Leading media reported that on Thursday the Knesset approved the 2008 state budget (around 315 billion shekels -- approximately \$81.3 billion) by a 64-to-31 majority. Forty-eight billion shekels will go to defense -- and 27.5 billion shekels to education. The media said that the passage of the budget was made possible when PM Olmert agreed to allocate 50 million shekels in January for protecting communities surrounding the Gaza Strip.

Major media reported that Shula Zaken, PM Olmert's former chief of staff, who had been suspected in an alleged bribery affair involving

the Tax Authority, was allowed to return to another position in Olmert's office.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Haifa's Rambam Medical Center has diagnosed a girl in Kabul, Afghanistan, with a rare genetic disorder found in only 90 people in the world.

All media reported that former FM David Levy, 70, is considering a comeback to politics.

A Yediot investigative report found that opposition leader MK Binyamin Netanyahu tried to promote the construction of a luxurious hotel and apartment complex in Jerusalem in which his relatives and associates are involved. Maariv reported that the police suspect Strategic Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman of having received money from a company he sold when he had become a minister.

Maariv reported that on Thursday the Israeli translation software firm Babylon signed a cooperation agreement with Google.

Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted ahead of the New Year:

Who will be prime minister at the end of 2008?

Binyamin Netanyahu: 41%; Ehud Olmert: 22%; Ehud Barak: 16%; Tzipi Livni: 8%.

Will an agreement be reached with the Palestinians?

Unlikely: 89%; likely: 10%.

Will Israel attack Iran?

Unlikely: 69%; likely: 28%.

. Will negotiations with Syria start?

Unlikely: 70%; likely: 29%.

Are you optimistic about Israel's condition?

Pessimistic: 54%; optimistic: 46%.

Are you optimistic about your personal condition?

Optimistic: 85%; pessimistic: 14%.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited a poll conducted in Saudi Arabia by the international organization Terror Free Tomorrow, which found that 89 % of Saudis hate the Jewish people.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Annapolis summit and the efforts to revive the peace process have exacerbated the tension that already existed between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice."

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in Ha'aretz: "Who still believes that by the end of George Bush's unfortunate term, a peace agreement will be attained and signed?.... Not much remains of the to-do at Annapolis."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Despite all the differences between Israel and Egypt, an existential threat coming from Iran and its allies is hovering over the heads of both nations."

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The current U.S. approach is absurd, given that it is almost the exact opposite of the approach that America should take to achieve its own objectives."

Block Quotes:

1. "What's the Hurry?"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/28): "The Annapolis summit and the efforts to revive the peace process have exacerbated the tension that already existed between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Olmert's personal charm doesn't work on Rice, and the Prime Minister's Office is anxious about her tendency to push ahead too quickly with political contacts.... Rice's exasperation with Israel stems primarily from the gap between expectations and results, and from the fast-dwindling time she has left on the seventh floor of the U.S. State Department. Rice thinks that Israel received a lot and didn't give anything in return.... As long as we're only talking with the Palestinians, everyone can sit comfortably in their cabinet seats. But a forceful evacuation of settlers, or far-reaching understandings with Abbas, could upset the partnership with

Lieberman and Shas. Olmert is well aware of this, and prefers to maintain the coalition and the government over making any serious moves in the territories. For Rice to understand this too, however, she'll have to be convinced each time anew."

II. "The Little that Remains"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in Ha'aretz (12/28): "Who still believes that by the end of George Bush's unfortunate term, a peace agreement will be attained and signed? Like dogs returning to their vomit, they will cover themselves with the Roadmap, which contains no road, barely a direction. It was only last month, and already Annapolis seems so distant, and an agreement more distant than ever.... The returnees from Annapolis were welcomed by the construction in Har Homa. And the river of excuses did not dry up, from 'municipal boundary' to 'state lands' to 'natural increase.' The whole world knows that no one has the power to enforce the law on the settlers, and therefore the state is enforcing it only on smokers.... Not much remains of the to-do at Annapolis."

III. "The True Egyptian Interest"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/28): "Despite all the differences between Israel and Egypt, an existential threat coming from Iran and its allies is hovering over the heads of both nations. The discussions conducted this week by Defense Minister Ehud Barak with the Egyptian President and heads of the Egyptian security establishment boil down to one question: How is the expansion of Iranian influence in the region to be halted? Mubarak wants a settlement in the Golan Heights in order to extract the Syrians from Iran's embrace. On the Palestinian front, the Egyptians have come to understand that reconciliation between the Palestinian factions may halt Iranian influence and that the road to such reconciliation must include a cease-fire with Israel. Therefore, the Egyptians commenced on a dialogue with Hamas for a Palestinian reconciliation and cease-fire with Israel immediately following the Annapolis summit. In order to recruit Israel for this effort, the Egyptians know that they must put more effort into halting ammunition smuggling through the Philadelphia Road. So, after having badmouthed Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, they are now sending a military delegation ... to search for solutions which will be to Israel's satisfaction. The Egyptians also understand that there will be no reconciliation of any kind as long as the Gilad Shalit affair is not put to end. They are going into this matter in full

throttle as well."

IV. "How to Pressure for Peace"

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/28): "It is absurd, of course, to suggest that Condoleezza Rice wants the Annapolis process to stall on take-off. But the current U.S. approach is absurd, given that it is almost the exact opposite of the approach that America should take to achieve its own objectives.... If Rice continues to squeeze Israel into a total settlement freeze and dismantling outposts, the Palestinians will continue to hide behind these demands rather than fulfill their own part of the bargain. The opposite, however, is not true. If Palestinians were to demonstrate meaningful movement

on ending incitement, accepting Israel's national rights, and cracking down on terrorism, this would generate much more internal political pressure for Israeli concessions than anything Rice could do. The underlying reality is that Israelis want the two-state solution more than the Palestinians. This means that the Israeli political system will automatically enter into peace euphoria mode if there are credible signs of Palestinian movement, while the Palestinian side will use any U.S. claims of Israeli non-compliance as an excuse to do nothing. Accordingly, if Rice wants the peace process to go somewhere, she should do the opposite of what she is doing now. She should spend more time on Iran than Annapolis, and put more pressure on the Palestinians than on Israel. This is not a matter of fairness (though it is also that), but a realistic assessment of what has a chance to work."

12. Assassination of Benazir Bhutto:

Summary:

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "After its fiasco in handling the Iranian nuclear ambitions, the United States now faces the no less grave challenge of maintaining stability in Pakistan without appearing as a party opposing a greater amount of democracy in that country."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If any were needed, the Bhutto assassination is a reminder that the world is facing a threat of unparalleled barbarity that will stop at nothing unless it is thwarted."

Block Quotes:

1. "An American Task"

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/28): "The anxiety seizing the entire world upon the death of Benazir Bhutto is fully justified. While Pakistan is improving its nuclear and missile capability, it is a slippery slope leading to increasing political instability.... It is with lack of fervor that Pakistan is being dragged into the war against global terror, following accusations that its intelligence services created al-Qaida.... Two weeks are left until the general elections and it is unclear whether they will be held in the prevailing chaos. In any case, after its fiasco in handling the Iranian nuclear ambitions, the United States now faces the no less grave challenge of maintaining stability in Pakistan without appearing as a party opposing a greater amount of democracy in that country. Another failure of American intelligence might be very costly to the world."

II. "Mourning Bhutto, and Heeding the Lesson"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/28): "The assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto illustrates the fragility of the current international order in the face of the radical Islamist threat. Pakistan is an Islamic country with nuclear weapons and security services that contain many sympathizers with the Taliban and al-Qaida. It is hardly clear that the massive U.S. investment in the Musharraf government as a bulwark against these same jihadi groups will be sustainable.... Israelis, of course, are familiar with the preferred jihadi weapon, the suicide bomber. But the terrorism in Pakistan is a reminder that no country is immune from such barbarism -- not even countries where the bombers and all the victims are Muslims. Pakistan, moreover, is thought of as a Western ally. Imagine a country where the jihadis are in charge and openly extol the virtues of murder through 'martyrdom' and one has described neighboring Iran. It is in this context that the eerie complacency characterizing the global approach to the Iranian threat is difficult to understand. This complacency can be most dramatically seen in the widespread disinterest in Moscow's growing support for Tehran..... In his first State of the Union address after 9/11, President George W. Bush stated, 'The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most

destructive weapons.' He repeated this pledge to the UN in 2003, and again to his fellow Americans in 2006. If any were needed, the Bhutto assassination is a reminder that the world is facing a threat of unparalleled barbarity that will stop at nothing unless it is thwarted."

MORENO